

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BEIRUT 3692

EXDIS TREAT AS NODIS

FROM THE AMBASSADOR

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PEPR, PBOR, PINT, LE
SUBJ: LEBANON IN EXTREMIS

1. TERRIBLE POUNDING OF EASTERN HALF OF BEIRUT BY SYRIAN
ARMY WENT ON UNTIL DAWN THIS MORNING, EVERY ROCKET AND EVERY
SHELL CLEARLY AUDIBLE FROM WHERE WE TRIED VAINLY TO SLEEP.
THERE IS A FITFUL CEASEFIRE IN EFFECT AS OF 1200 JULY 3 AND
I UNDERSTAND FROM FOREIGN MINISTER THAT THEY ARE WORKING ON
ITS PROLONGATION AND THAT THE SITUATION IS NOT AS BAD AS IT
WAS YESTERDAY (WHEN HE DESCRIBED IT AS "VERY TERRIBLE") BUT
THAT IT IS STILL VERY DANGEROUS. MEANWHILE, THE LEBANESE
GOVERNMENT HAS PROJECTED PUBLIC IMAGE OF ABSOLUTE INACTION
IN THE FACE OF THE SYRIAN ATTACK, AND HAS SAID NOTHING
ABOUT THE FATUOUS STATEMENT ISSUED BY THE SYRIANS LAST NIGHT
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PAGE 02 BEIRUT 03692 01 OF 02 031504Z

TO THE EFFECT THAT THEY WERE HERE SOLELY TO SUPPORT THE REGIME
AND CARRY OUT THE ORDERS OF PRESIDENT SARKIS. THE OBVIOUS,
BUT ERRONEOUS, IMPLICATION OF THE STATEMENT IS THAT SARKIS
MUST HAVE ORDERED THE ATTACK. HE DID NOT, OF COURSE, AND
PRESIDENT CHAMOUN TOLD ME LAST NIGHT THAT SARKIS HAD TOLD
HIM HE HAD BEEN IN TOUCH WITH SYRIANS AND ASKED THEM TO STOP.
ACCORDING TO CHAMOUN, SYRIANS HAD NOT PAID ANY ATTENTION.

THE SYRIANS ARE AN OCCUPYING ARMY, AND THE COMEDY THAT THEY ARE UNDER SARKIS' CONTROL IS NOW OVER.

2. ALTHOUGH ORIGINS OF SYRIAN ARMED PRESENCE ARE DIFFERENT, THE PRESENT SITUATION IS REMINISCENT OF WORLD WAR II, WHEN VARIOUS QUISLING REGIMES IN EUROPE WERE UNWILLING OR UNABLE TO OBJECT TO OR PREVENT THE GERMANS FROM COMMITTING ATROCITIES BEYOND DESCRIPTION. WHATEVER THE PHALANGE MAY HAVE DONE, EAST BEIRUT DID NOT DESERVE THE SORT OF INDISCRIMINATE AND BARBARIC BOMBARDMENT IT HAS SUFFERED THE PAST TWO DAYS. THAT THE SYRIANS SEEM TO HAVE NO MORE DISCRIMINATING TECHNIQUE FOR DEALING WITH CHRISTIAN PROVOCATIONS IS UNFORTUNATE. AS MUSLIM IBN QURAYSH SAID WHEN ABANDONED BY HIS SYRIAN ALLIES AT HIS DEFEAT BY THE TURKS IN 1085, "O SYRIA OF ILL OMEN*"

3. MEANSHILE, PRESIDENT SARKIS IS FACED WITH SOME BITTER CHOICES. BY HIS SILENCE HE IS IN EFFECT ACQUIESCING IN SYRIAN ACTIONS AND REMAINS THEIR PRISONER. THE FACT THAT HE DOES NOT WANT US SPEAKING TO THE SYRIANS ON HIS BEHALF IS INDICATIVE OF HIS FEAR OF THEM. HE IS PROBABLY AFRAID THAT IF HE CHALLENGES THEM OR ASKS THEM TO LEAVE THEY WILL DO SO, AND THE COUNTRY WILL LAPSE BACK INTO ITS OWN CIVIL WAR. ALTERNATELY, HE MAY ALSO FEAR THAT THEY WILL REFUSE AND WILL ELIMINATE HIM AS THEY DID JUMBLATT.

4. HIS FEARS ARE UNDERSTANDABLE, BUT IT IS HARD TO SEE HOW
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PAGE 03 BEIRUT 03692 01 OF 02 031504Z

HE CAN CONTINUE TO GOVERN, EVEN IF ONLY IN NAME, IF HE DOES NOT DO SOMETHING MORE RESOLUTE TO PROTECT HIS PEOPLE. HE CERTAINLY WILL FORFEIT HIS CLAIM TO LIGITIMACY IN THE MINDS OF MOST CHRISTIAN LEBANESE IF HE DOES NOT.

5. MEANWHILE, HIS FOREIGN MINISTER SEEMS TO BE SUFFERING A NERVOUS DEPRESSION AND TO HAVE LARGELY GIVEN UP (ALTHOUGH HE SOUNDS A LITTLE BRIGHTER THIS MORNING). HE SPENT MOST OF SUNDAY, ALONG WITH EVERYONE ELSE IN ASHRAFIYAH, HUDDLED IN THE BASEMENT OF HIS APARTMENT BUILDING, COMING OUT FROM TIME TO TIME TO TELEPHONE HERE AND THERE. ON THOSE OCCASIONS WHEN I SPOKE TO HIM, HE SOUNDED LIKE A ZOMBIE AND HAD NOTHING TO SUGGEST OR ASK.

6. THE PRIME MINISTER, WHO IS AT THE PALACE WITH SARKIS AND BOUTROS AS I DRAFT THIS, HAS CANCELLED HIS REQUEST THAT I CALL ON HIM THIS MORNING, BUT I ASSUME HE WAS GOING TO SPEAK ALONG THE LINES OF OUR LAST CONVERSATION (BEIRUT 3533) AND THE PUBLIC STATEMENT CARRIED BY THE PRESS YESTERDAY TO THE EFFECT THE GOL COULD NO LONGER GOVERN BUT WAS BLOCKED AT EVERY TURN. PERHAPS HE IS PLANNING TO RESIGN. I CERTAINLY WOULD IN HIS SHOES, OR SARKIS' FOR THAT MATTER.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 BEIRUT 3692

EXDIS TREAT AS NODIS

FROM THE AMBASSADOR

7. I CANNOT PREDICT WHAT WILL HAPPEN NEXT, BUT I ASSUME
PHALANGE AND PERHAPS CHAMOUNISTS WILL CONTINUE SNIPING
AT SYRIANS AND THAT FIRING WILL BE RESUMED SOONER OR
LATER, I.E., THAT THE CONFRONTATION IS NOT OVER AND
THAT BOTH SIDES WILL BE CONSIDERABLY BLOODIED BEFORE
IT IS. I SEE NO WAY OF STOPPING IT UNLESS WE ARE
PREPARED TO SPEAK CROSSLY TO EVERYONE, AND PARTICULARLY
TO SYRIANS, ISRAELIS AND SARKIS, AND TO PUT OUR FULL
WEIGHT BEHIND A NEW ARRANGEMENT OF SOME SORT. WHAT I
WOULD LIKE TO TELL SARKIS IS THAT HE HAD BETTER STAND
UP AND BARK AT ALL CONCERNED OR HE AND LEBANON ARE
FINISHED. TO DO SO, HOWEVER, WOULD IMPLY AN AMERICAN
WILLINGNESS AND ABILITY TO STEP IN AND HELP IF THE
SYRIANS WITHDRAW AS A RESULT.

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PAGE 02 BEIRUT 03692 02 OF 02 031450Z

8. IDEALLY, WE SOULD SEND IN THE MARINES, BUT THAT IS NO LONGER POSSIBLE. ALTERNATIVELY, I HAVE TWO OTHER SUGGESTIONS, NEITHER ONE OF WHICH MAY BE PRACTICAL, BUT PERHAPS THEY WILL PROMOTE USEFUL DISCUSSION.

A. WE COULD URGE SARKIS TO GET RID OF THE SYRIANS AND URGE THE EGYPTIANS TO TAKE THEIR PLACE. SADAT, OF COURSE, HAS STEADFASTLY REFUSED TO GET INVOLVED, AND I PRESUME CHANGING HIS MIND WOULD BE DIFFICULT. OUR EXPLORING THIS IDEA WITH HIM, HOWEVER, MIGHT PUT THE FEAR OF GOD IN THE SYRIANS.

B. WE COULD SEEK A GREATLY EXPANDED UNIFIL TO POLICE THE ENTIRE COUNTRY WHEN THE SYRIANS WITHDRAW.

9. BOTH THESE SUGGESTIONS ASSUME THAT THE SYRIANS WOULD BE WILLING TO WITHDRAW. WHICH IS A BIG ASSUMPTION. IF THEY WERE ASKED TO LEAVE AND REFUSED, I WOULD EXPECT A REAL BATTLE OF NATIONAL LIBERATION IN WHICH THE LEBANESE ARMY WOULD JOIN THE PHALANGE AND PBL IN FIGHTING THE SYRIANS. THE LOSS OF LIFE WOULD BE EVEN GREATER AND I WOULD EXPECT THE ISRAELIS TO BE DRAWN IN SOONER OR LATER

10. IF ON THE OTHER HAND, THE SYRIANS DID LEAVE AND, SAY, THE EGYPTIANS REPLACED THEM, THE BASIC PROBLEM WOULD STILL BE INSOLUBLE UNLESS SOMETHING IS DONE ABOUT DISARMING BOTH PALESTINIANS AND CHRISTIANS. IN THIS REGARD, I WOULD EXPECT THE EGYPTIANS TO HAVE A REPEAT OF THE SYRIAN EXPERIENCE. PERHAPS THEY WOULD SHOW A LITTLE MORE FLEXIBILITY IN DEALING WITH IT, HOWEVER, AND PERHAPS THEY WOULD INFUSE SOME RESOLUTE-NESS INTO SARKIS.

11. BASIC TO ANY SUCH APPROACH BY US, HOWEVER, IS A WILLINGNESS
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PAGE 03 BEIRUT 03692 02 OF 02 031450Z

OF THE GOL TO ACT. TO DATE IT HAS NOT BEEN WILLING. SARKIS IS NOT PREPARED TO STAND UP AND TEAR AT HIS OPPONENTS. THE OTHER DAY HE DESCRIBED TO ME AGAIN THE PLAN HE HAD HAD FOR NATIONAL CONCILIATION, NOTED THAT IT HAD FAILED AND COMMENTED SADLY THAT HE HAD NO OTHER. ONE CANNOT RULE A COUNTRY LIKE THIS WITH THAT APPROACH.

12. THE ABOVE ARE SOME PRELIMINARY THOUGHTS AND IS COMPOSED IN HASTE AND UNDER STRESS. AT THIS POINT, I AM DEEPLY PESSIMISTIC ABOUT THE FUTURE OF THIS PLACE, AND I EXPECT LEBANON'S COMING APART, IF IT OCCURS, TO LEAD TO THE NEXT ARAB-ISRAEL WAR, WHAT-EVERY THE REGIMES IN SYRIA, ISRAEL AND EGYPT MAY THINK TODAY.
PARKER

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